TAGORE, THE BENGALI WHOSE WRITINGS WON NOBEL PRIZE

The Work of This Oriental Literary Genius, Now Thus Signalized to the Occidental World, Has Aroused Joy and Admiration in the Minds of Many Eminent Men.

He Is a Dissenting Brahmin, an Oxford Graduate, and, Besides Being a Leader of Eastern Thought and Poet of Love and Religion, Is a Dramatist and Musician, .

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

THE world-wide interest awakened by the award of the Nobel prizes has always been out of all proportion to their actual value. Like the white rays of a searchlight, they have singled in a night one worker after another from obscurity. Their action is wholly positive and generous, for they often have made, but never unmade, reputations. Like the dynamite that created them by making Alfred Nobel's forture, they have set vast forces at work. In less than twenty years these prizes have become so significant that the eyes of all civilized nations are annually turned toward Stockholm to learn of their announcement and to read the generous bulletin that lifts contempt from living genius by telling the people of the world where to look for their own prophets.

Some years ago, when Selma Lagerlof, a woman, won the Nobel prize for literature, there was a gasp of astonishment; but Western culture is even more thoroughly amazed to-day. For the award this year has passed over the heads of Occidentals, utterly disregarding the work of established writers of "the superior white race" to pick from the heart of the East, from the Indian province of Bengal, a poet whose writings have attracted little attention in the Western Hemisphere, although among fifty millions of people the present literary era is called by this poet's first name.

THE CRITICS APPLAUD.

Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali, a dissenting Brahmin, has won the Nobel prize. The most discerning literary critics of the day applaud the choice. Orientals who are in Western countries show little surprise at Tagore's new laurels, although confessing their satisfaction. They say that there seems to be no poet so famous among the Europeans as Tagore is famous in India.

William Butler Yeats, the Irish poet, says that the translated writings of Tagore have stirred his blood as has nothing else for years; that when reading the verses in manuscript he carried them with him in railway cars and in restaurants, and was often forced to put them away lest the people near by should see how strongly they moved him.

Crossing to America, we find Professor William Lyon Phelps, of Yale University, declaring that he is pleased at the award, which has been particularly successful in fulfilling the wishes of the founder of the prize in attracting the attention of the whole world to a man whose work ought to be universally known. In this city Professor A. V. W. Jackson, of Columbia University, who has written and lectured frequently on the literature of India and Persia, believes that the granting of the Nobel prize to a Bengali will do more than signalize Tagore's own work—that it will open the eyes of Americans to the beauty of Eastern literature and the purity of Eastern thought and bring the ideals of East and West more closely together than any other influence of previous years.

THE AWARD SURPRISES.

In commenting on the award of the Nobel prize Professor Phelps said that he found himself in agreement with the views expressed by Mr. Lee in his interesting book, "The Crowd."

"I think that Mr. Lee will be pleased with this particular award," said he, "as it so admirably illustrates his own ideas. The Nobel prize accomplishes much more when it surprises the world than when it merely registers or ratifies public opinion. For years Mr. Tagore has been enormously popular in India, but practically unknown to the Western world. I have read only his book 'Gitanjali,' which the author himself has translated into English prose—prose that resembles in some degree the language of Solomon's Song. I confess I cannot quite share the unbounded enthusiasm of W. B. Yeats, who finds in these poems, so he says, 'a world I have dreamed of all my life long.' But I can quite understand Mr. Yeats's enthusiasm, even though I cannot honestly share it. My Yankee mind is too remote from the world of mystical pantheism where Tagore dwells to surrender fully to his influence or to feel that he can ever be to me what some rhapsodical critic has called him, 'a spiritual revelation.' David's Psalms satisfy me much more completely. But I have read enough to feel the presence of genius, to realize once more how impossible it is for man to live without religion, and to be deeply stirred by this exotic mystical aspiration. What particularly interests me in the work of Mr. Tagore is the original combination of intense rapture of mysticism with intense love of this world; he has all the fervor of Thomas à Kempis, with all the delight in life of, say, Stevenson. His soul goes out to God as the hart panteth after the water brooks; but he expresses his adoration through a passionate love of all forms of beauty in God's world.

A PROVERB GONE WRONG.

"The award of the prize is sure to attract general attention to a prophet who thus far has been without honor save in his own country, not the only paradoxical thing about this particular prophet."

The Macmillan Company, the publishers of Tagore's translated writings, are producing two new books by him at this the psychological moment. They have already published his "Gitanjali" (song offerings) in England, and "The Gardener," also a volume of verse, in England and America. The former, which has an introduction by Yeats, contains Tagore's later verses, written after his love songs had stirred the hearts of Bengal. Love is not its theme, however; it is rather the religious ecstasy of a prophet and a dreamer, and the English version suffers as little as possible at the hands of the translator because the poet has translated them himself, often paraphrasing them to preserve their spirit and unity.

But one of the newer books is perhaps of even greater interest to Western readers, as Tagore has given them not only philosophy that "makes the reader forget all the troubles of the world," and attempted to bring them in touch with the ancient spirit of India, but has contrasted the East and the West in an interesting manner. This book is called "Sadhana, the Realization of Life." Tagore declares that while the religious texts and scriptures of India are vital and alive to the Orientals, they are too often merely curiosities to Western scholars and seem to have for them "merely a retrospective and archaeological interest."

THE WRAPPINGS OF ERUDITION.

He cannot help thinking, he says, that they lose their significance when thus shown in labelled cases as "mummied specimens of human thought and aspiration," and in 'Sadhana" he has endeavored to free them from their "wrappings or erudition" and to set them forth as they are for Western minds. He has also given in connected form ideas of life that he has been accustomed to express to his pupils in his school at Bolpur, in Bengal.

In contrasting the ideals of America and India, which is the only abstract of this book which the space of the present article allowed, the writer says that the first invasion of each country forms an exact parallel. In each case the invaders were confronted with primeval forests and were compelled to war with aboriginal races. But while the struggle between man and man and man and nature continued without compromise in America, it was otherwise in the East. "In India the forests which were the habitation of barbarians became the sanctuary of sages, but in America these great living cathedrals of nature had no deeper significance to man. They brought wealth and power to him, and perhaps at times they ministered to his enjoyment of beauty, and inspired a solitary poet. They never acquired a sacred association in the hearts of men as the site of some great spiritual reconcilement where man's soul had its meeting place with the soul of the world."

But civilization, he continues, "is a kind of mould that each nation is making for itself to shape its men and women according to its best ideal. All its institutions, its legislature, its conscious and unconscious teachings tend toward that object. The modern civilization of the West by all its organized efforts is trying to turn out men perfect in physical, intellectual and moral efficiency. There the vast energies of the nations are employed in extending man's power over his surroundings, and the people are combining and straining every faculty to possess and to turn to account all that they can lay their hands upon, to overcome every obstacle in their path of conquest. They are ever disciplining themselves to fight nature and other races; their armaments are getting more and more stupendous every day; their machines, their appliances, their organizations go on multiplying at an amazing rate. This is a splendid achievement, no doubt, and a wonderful manifestation of man's masterfulness which knows no obstacle, and which has for its object the supremacy of himself over everything else.

"The ancient civilization of India had its own ideal of perfection toward which its efforts were directed. Its aim was not attaining power, and it neglected to cultivate to the utmost its capacities, and to organize men for defensive and offensive purposes, for co-operation in the acquisition of wealth and for military and political ascendancy. The ideal that India tried to realize led her best men to the isolation of a contemplative life, and the treasures that she gained for mankind by penetrating into the mysteries of reality cost her dear in the sphere of worldly success. Yet this also was a sublime achievement—it was a supreme manifestation of that human aspiration which knows no limit and which has for its object nothing less than the realization of the Infinite."

RABINDRANATH TAGORE AGE 16 © by the Macmillan Co

"In our country," continues the sage, "he who truly loves God receives such homage from men as would be considered almost sacrilegious in the West. We see in him God's wish fulfilled, the most difficult of all obstacles to His revealment removed, and God's own perfect joy fully blossoming in humanity. Through him we find the whole world of man overspread with a divine homeliness. His life, burning with God's love, makes all our earthly love resplendent.

"It is not only in Buddhism and the Indian religions, but in Christianity, too, that the ideal of selflessness is preached with all fervor. In the last the symbol of death has been used for expressing the idea of man's deliverance from the life which is not true. This is the same as Nirvana, the symbol of the extinction of the lamp.

"In the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is the deliverance from avidya—from ignorance. It is not in destroying anything that is positive and real, for that cannot be possible, but that which is negative, which obstructs our vision of truth. When this obstruction, which is ignorance, is removed, then only is the eyelid drawn up which is no loss to the eye.

"Though the West has accepted as its teacher Him who boldly proclaimed His oneness with his Father, and who exhorted His followers to be as perfect as God, it has never been reconciled to this idea of our unity with the infinite being. It condemns as a piece of blasphemy any implication of man's becoming God. This is certainly not the idea that Christ preached, nor perhaps the idea of the Christian mystics, but this seems to be the idea that has become popular in the Christian West.

"But the highest wisdom in the East holds that it is not the function of our soul to gain God, to utilize Him for any special material purpose. All that we can ever aspire to is to become more and more one with God."

Such are the contrasts between the East and the West that are dwelt upon by this remarkable Oriental—an Oxford graduate, a father whose sons have been educated in our own University of Illinois, a poet in love with the verses of Tennyson and Shelley, a musician who, justly or unjustly, has been given a place by some of his own countrymen, that ranks with that of Beethoven or Wagner. Rabindranath Tagore is not only a poet and a philosopher; his versatility is amazing. He has written numbers of short stories, few of which have been translated in Europe but which have appeared in translated form in Anglo-Indian newspapers. Dramas written by him when he was little more than a boy are being played in Calcutta to-day. Of these "The Rajah and Rani" is one of the most popular.

Among the students at Columbia University there is a Bengali doctor named C. Chakraberty, a student of medicine, who has known Tagore both in his home in Calcutta and when he visited this country and read his paper before the professors and students of Harvard University. Dr. Chakraberty said that Tagore was considered more highly among his countrymen than any other living poet, but that even if he had never written a word of poetry he would still hold a title to great fame by reason of the national songs that he had composed and the musical compositions that have ranked him among the Hindus as one of the greatest of their composers.

EAST SUFFICIENT UNTO ITSELF.

The poet, said Dr. Chakraberty, has the firm belief that India has little, if anything, to learn from Western civilization; that the East in all the higher forms of thought is sufficient unto itself. And while this has not been actually expressed in the book, "Sadhana," it is forcefully implied in many places.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1860 in Calcutta, coming from a family that has long been famous for its wealth and intellectual accomplishments. The poet's grandfather was almost as widely known among the Indians as the grandson is today. He was Maharsi Devendranath Tagore, the founder of the Landholders' Society.

Other members of the Tagore family have been widely known for their philosophical learning and their musical accomplishments. Gogonendranath and Abanindranath Tagore are artists, while Dwijendranath, the poet's brother, is both a philosopher and a naturalist, whose powers over wild life are so great that, according to a countryman of his, "the squirrels come from the boughs and climb on to his knees and the birds alight upon his hands."

The father of the present poet gave up an important civic title, it is stated, in order to assume that of Maha Rishi, or "great sage." He was quick to see the signs of genius or the promise of that quality in his son, and encouraged his intellectual development by every means in his power. When the boy was eleven years old his father sent him to the Himalayas in order that the majesty of these great mountains might have its effect upon his soul and his development.

That time marked the end of Rabindranath's schooling, although for several years thereafter he received instruction from his father. When seventeen years old he went to Oxford University.

Returning from Oxford to Calcutta, Tagore became engrossed in literary composition, writing much about natural objects and composing plays as well as novels and poems. From the age of twenty-five to thirty-five, when he had a sorrowful love affair, he wrote what is considered the most beautiful love poetry that was ever composed in his language. This poetry, which was sensuous, colorful and flaming with passion, is the delight of Eastern lovers, and it has been stated that the rich beauty of the poems alarmed the Hindus, who feared that the verses would have a baleful effect upon the morals of young men.

The love affair from which the poet suffered, and which had so great an influence upon his work, is said by a countryman of his to be a passion he conceived for his cousin, who, according to Indian law, could never become his wife, as widows and cousins in that country are not allowed to marry. The cousin, who returned the poet's love, married elsewhere, and Tagore did likewise. Although his affection could never be requited, he continued to care for his cousin and she for him, and to-day the families of the two lovers live in the closest friendship.

As the genius of the poet expanded a more spiritual quality became infused into his writing, until from the poet of love he has now become the poet of religion. Mr. Tagore, said Dr. Chakraberty, is a dissenting Brahmin, who does not believe in the limitations of caste. He fears above all things agnosticism, and the fervor of his belief is evident in every line of his later poetry.

TWO POEMS.

Perhaps the change in his literary work is illustrated in the following poem, which is taken from "Gitanjali":

In desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of my room; I find her not.

My house is small, and what once has gone from it can never be regained.

But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have come to thy door.

I stand under the golden canopy of thine evening sky and I lift my eager eyes to thy face.

I have come to the brink of eternity, from which nothing can vanish—no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears.

Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean; plunge it into the deepest fulness. Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe.

Here is another example from the same book of poetry:

I was not aware of the moment when I first crossed the threshold of this life.

What was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery like a bud in the forest at midnight?

When in the morning I looked upon the light I felt in a moment that I was no stranger to this world, that the inscrutable, without name and form, had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.

Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me. And because I love this life I know I shall love death as well.

The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.

And here is a delightful little poem taken from his new volume of child verses, "The Crescent Moon":

"BABY'S WORLD."

"Where have I come from? Where did you pick me up?" the baby asked its mother.

She answered half-crying, half-laughing, and clasping the baby to her breast: "You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling.

"You were in the dolls of my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made and unmade you then.

"You were enshrined with our household deity, in his worship I worshipped you.

"In all my hopes and my loves, in my life, in the life of my mother, you have lived.

"In the lap of the deathless Spirit who rules our home you have been nursed for ages.

"When in girlhood my heart was opening its petals you hovered as a fragrance about it.

"Your tender softness bloomed in my youthful limbs, like a glow in the sky before the sunrise.

"Heaven's first darling, twin-born with the morning light, you have floated down the stream of the world's life, and at last you have stranded on my heart.

"As I gaze on your face, mystery overwhelms me; you who belong to all have become mine.

"For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast. What magic has snared the world's treasure in these slender arms of mine?"

These verses have been written by a poet who received no attention whatever when he visited this country some months ago. At the time when Arnold Bennett and Alfred Noyes were being interviewed and quoted, Tagore passed almost without comment. It is true that in Cambridge, and later in Chicago, he read some of his papers and won both friends and admirers. But it has remained for the judges at Stockholm to show to the Americans the worth of a man that the West has hitherto slighted.

AMERICA'S ILL-REGULATED TWILIGHT ZONE IS COUNTY GOVERNMENT

TAMMANY is dead! Long live Tammany!

Everybody was bravely proclaiming the Tiger's demise the morning after election as he read his paper on the way to the office. Men breathed easier and had a new topic of conversation. There was no doubt of it.

"Look at the returns!" they exclaimed. Practically the whole Board of Estimate and Apportionment will be fusion. It would have been nice to have made a clean sweep, but you can't win everything. It was only in The Bronx and Queens and Richmond that the enemy got any comfort. But those boroughs don't control things."

Those who read The Tribune the following Sunday found an article headed: "Tiger Gloating Over Fat Bronx County Jobs—Stilwell-Tammany Frame-Up Means $672,470 a Year in Patronage—Offices Are Overloaded—Extravagance in Salaried Places Will Give Wigwam Sustenance at Heavy Cost to Taxpayers." They read that the offices in which Tammany would be able to reap this revenue were those of County Judge, Surrogate, District Attorney, Sheriff, County Clerk and Register. Perhaps they were less inclined after reading this to shout "Tammany is dead!" but were willing to admit that there was something to the legend about the nine lives of the Tammany tiger, despite the fact that the animal lost the $660,180 in the county offices of New York County and the major part of the New York City patronage.

THE DISAPPEARING SUPERVISOR.

In The Tribune of Saturday, November 8, there was an article which bore this caption: "H. C. Merritt Vanishes—Glynn Sends Examiners—Tuckahoe Supervisor, Who Was Bronx Valley Commissioner, Leaves No Trace—Experts Now on Books—Missing Official, a Prominent Westchester Democrat, Is Replaced by Man Elected to Succeed Him." Under this heading there was an account of the disappearance of a man widely known in Westchester County immediately following a statement by his opponent on the county ticket for Supervisor that he had examined the accounts of the incumbent of the office and had found that he had been making overcharges and issuing certificates of indebtedness greatly in excess of the amount of the uncollected taxes, which the certificates were supposed to meet. Governor Glynn sent examiners to investigate his accounts, and a heavy shortage has been reported. He was a contractor on the state roads and the barge canal.

These items of news illustrate one of the weakest links in the system of American state government. The county is the twilight zone in politics. The eyes of all are intent upon town, city, state and national governments and the elections in which definite policies are to be decided. Those who head the tickets are in the public eye. Few stop to consider the way in which the county government is run. It was in the investigation of the management of county affairs in New York State that Governor Glynn made his reputation as a state officer. This was in the course of the administration of Governor Hughes. It is a case of where the taxes are paid, there the heart is also—and taxes are not paid by the individual into the county treasury.

We have national, state and municipal civil service, but few county employes are protected by law in their jobs. With every change of administration there may be a change in employes. The patronage idea may have full sway. That is why Tammany may say, "All is not lost. While we have the county government, we still live." That is why political machines in other parts of the state do not die of starvation when reform sweeps men into the offices of Governor, Senator and Assemblyman, and everything seems to be going against them.

The citizen is not particularly interested in such routine functions as housing and feeding the poor, recording deeds, passing upon wills, holding the cash of the county treasury, capturing, convicting and sentencing thieves, conducting jails, and deciding whether persons have met their death from natural causes or through violence.

The N.Y. County Court House — The Monument to the Graft of "Boss" Tweed

The County Tuberculosis Hospital which was without Water for several years

The poor and all of these other details of government they have always with them. They are uninteresting to busy men and women who have their livelihood or fortunes to make. The politician is interested, however. There is no concentrated supervising power over the county government, and when crimes, political in their origin, occur the politicians have the officials by the throat, and often nothing is done. Even the sources of publicity are dried up in many counties through the fact that small papers receive their chief sustenance from county advertising. It is said that in New Jersey there are scores of small newspapers that would die of inanition were the stream of county patronage dammed up. Perhaps it is this lack of knowledge of conditions and of interest on the part of the public that accounts for the kind of almshouses and jails found in many counties.

While the counties have been the last to feel the influence of the wave of modernization in governmental machinery, the day is dawning for them, for steps are being taken in some of the states to correct the evils which have been discovered. The Short Ballot Organization proposes to introduce measures in the New York Legislature when it meets this winter looking toward an improvement in the county governments of this state.

Westchester County has not waited for such a movement, but has already investigated itself with a view to remedying the evils found.

The county is an importation from England. In details, counties differ in the various states in their functions and powers. In New York State the governing power is centred in a board of supervisors, made up of one from each town. Its duties include the supervision of the finances and administrative duties of the county and the auditing of the county bills. This board may have as many as forty or fifty members, which means that the work is not sufficiently concentrated to be handled efficiently. Many of the supervisors may actually be and are ignorant of the obligations placed upon them by law, and unconsciously violate it. The other officers elected in the county are the superintendent of the poor, a treasurer, a clerk, a judge, a surrogate, a sheriff, a district attorney, a coroner and, in such counties as have taken advantage of their privilege, a controller. Of course, the functions of the counties in New York City have been assumed in a large measure by the city itself. Such, for instance, are the care of the poor, the management of the finances, the collection of taxes and the police duties of the sheriff.

The character of the county mechanism seems to lend itself readily to the election of ignorant and inefficient, if not corrupt, officials. It is like a miasmatic swamp. It is difficult to escape from it unscathed and in good health. Disease is likely to break out at any time.

IN A CENTRAL COUNTY.

Up in one of the counties in the central tier of New York there is a township in which three-fourths of the taxes are paid by non-residents. It contains approximately 175 voters. The pickings from a fund of between $15,000 and $20,000, if handled "right," would be worth all it cost to buy an election as supervisor. At $5 apiece enough voters could be purchased for $500 to win the election hands down, no allowance being made for favorable votes that might be cast without

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